LITERARY NEWS, VIEWS AND CRITICISM

NEW BOOKS.

Thrillers.

Of the fiction that depends chiefly on sustained excitement for its effects there is a large supply in this year's exuberant crop of books, and, as a rule, it shares with the other forms of fiction in the general improvement in expression, construction and respectable workmanship. In "The Closing Net" (Dodd, Mead and Company) Henry C. Rowland has spun a yarn of the Parisian criminal world as entertaining and as fantastic as those of his French models. His analysis of the gentleman burglar's psychology and his demonstration of the sensitive honor that obtains among thieves may not wholly convince the reader; they are the cause of a good deal of repetition, but they do well enough for the purpose of the story. The episodes besides being exciting are gratifying to national pride, for the American invariably comes out best. We meet two attractive young women among the characters and a picturesque vocabulary of modern slang. As for the plot, it is of the kind that keeps men reading into small hours of the night.

From the point of view of art no fault can be found with Norman Way's "The Moccasins of Gold" (Edward J. Clode, New York). It is a straightforward account of the search for a mysterious gold mine in the wilds of Alaska. From the start the reader is aware that the gold that comes from it seems to bear a curse for the possessor; he will want to know whether or not the hero can find the place and if the curse falls on him to. The people in the Alaska gold fields are described vividly; there are fine fellows and pretty complete scoundrels among them, also some interesting women and a noble dog. Plenty of adventure, including a good fist fight, will hold the reader's attention closely.

It is an amusing haphazard farce that Tom Gallon has written in "As He Was Born" (George H. Doran Company,) that readers will enjoy in spite of its faults. The author applies a senseless American freak of a generation ago, starting a man in our first father's costume to earn his way across the country or something of that kind, to British provincial surroundings. His hero, a happy go lucky young fellow with British inadaptability to novel circumstances, is quickly helped out of his predicament. Then Mr Gallon mixes in rather carelessly old time roaring farce with the pretty sentiment of the "open road" that is now fashionable. His little heroine is charming, his tramp philosopher is entertaining, his stock funny people are amusing. The preposterous situations are managed well, so that the reader is kept in suspense as to what will happen next. It is not as good work as the author has done recently; he had two good stories which he has not taken the pains to weld together properly.

With great skill Charles E. Walk in "The Time Lock" (A. C. McClurg and Company) excites his reader's interest in the strange doings that are observed from a club window and through two-thirds of the story keeps him thoroughly mystified, which is the proper purpose of the sort of story he is writing. The solution is wholly unexpected but seems weak, for it turns on matters that are apart from the things to which attention has been drawn, and the reader may feel irritated at having been directed to so many false trails. This makes much condensed explanation necessary at the end, which is not artistic. The story is much more exciting than most mystery tales, however, and Mr. Walk has certainly succeeded in making one of his heroes a gentleman throughout.

Skill in handling his fists is one of the chief assets of the hero in Charles Alden Seltzer's "The Coming of the Law" (Outing Publishing Company). Whether this, even when combined with a resolute mind and a masterful eye, would be effective in real life in dealing with men armed with revolvers and knives may be doubted, it is all right in fiction, however, and the author does allow the hero to be licked once by overwhelming odds. The story is full of exciting episodes, but differs from the common run of Western tales in that legal methods are opposed to the picturesque forms of poetic justice usually dealt out in that form of fiction. The hero engages in the dangerous pastime of publishing a frontier newspaper. It is rather hard to imagine that even in Arizona a United States judge who wishes to do his duty should be as helpless as his friend is represented. There are many scraps in the book, many interesting people, and the love story is fortunately subsidiary to more serious matters.

A curiously belated example of the sensational tale as it used to be before enterprising authors lifted it into the ranks of reputable fiction will be found in H. A. Cody's "The Long Patrol" (Hodder and Stoughton; George H. Doran Company). The inefficiency of the hero is discreditable to the North West Police, of which he is represented to be a brilliant member, but it is surpassed by the stupidity of the villains opposed to him. A catastrophe at the end of nearly every chapter, the stage fittings of several melodramas and Canadian scenery are thrown in together promiscuously.

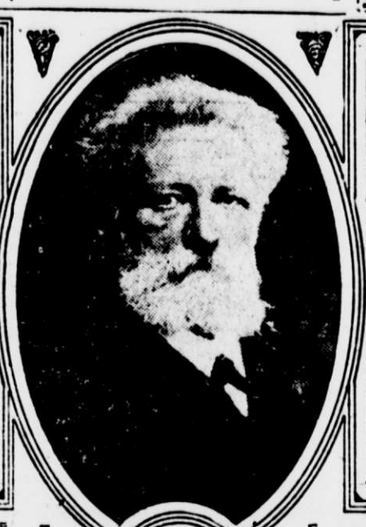
A Prosaic Chaucer.

In days gone by the translations of the classics published by the excellent Mr. Bohn saved many hours of toil in youth and probably many college degrees. Whether they gave any idea of the beauties contained in the ancient poets may be questioned; certainly they were esteemed from a utilitarian point of view and not for any regard for the good English employed by the scholars who translated. That any need should be felt for translating an English poet, however antiquated his language may be, into the speech of the present day is rather surprising, yet that is the task that John S. P. Tatlock and Percy Mackaye have performed for "The Complete Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer" (Macmillans), a stately quarto which Warwick Goble has illustrated in color.

Now, how can a poet be turned into prose and retain his savor? With even the greatest it is not so much what they say as the way they say it that counts. Imagine Shelley or Wordsworth or Tennyson turned into prose. To be sure Chaucer tells interesting stories as Shakespeare does, and it may be worth the time of a Charles Lamb to tell those stories for children. With all the difficulties his English presents Chaucer is surely not beyond the reach of the intelligent reader who will make use of his glossaries and a little patience. Yet there are many not so industrious, and for them the authors have labored; they have judged them correctly in expurgating the text, even if it turns masterpieces into nonsense. No fault is to be found with the translation; it is reverent enough in its way; women's clubs will enjoy it and talk learnedly of Chaucer and so will those who can stand: "When the sweet showers of April have pierced to the root the dryness of March, and bathed every vine in moisture, whose quickening brings forth the flowers," for that is Chaucer's sense.

Mr. Goble's pictures illustrate the translation very well indeed; we must go back to mediæval miniatures to get the spirit of Chaucer.

Jos. C Lincoln, AUTHOR OF "THE RISE OF ROSCOE PAINE."



Rudolf Eucken, AUTHOR AND PHILOSOPHER.

Geo Randolph Chester, AUTHOR OF FIVE THOUSAND AN HOUR AND "THE JINGO."

Harrison Fisher, "MAIDENS FAIR."

Rupert Hughes, AUTHOR OF "MISS 318 and MR. 37" "EXCUSE ME," ETC.

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William Sharp.

With the three volumes before us the uniform edition of the "Works of William Sharp" (Duffield and Company) is, we imagine, completed. There have been seven volumes of the pieces he published under the pseudonym "Fiona MacLeod" and four of those that appeared under his own name. Now we have volume V. of the "Works," containing the dramatic pieces included in "Vistas" and some stories, essays and sketches. These have all been selected and arranged by Mrs. Sharp, according to her husband's intentions, and the matter of exclusion and of arrangement is explained in the bibliographical note.

The other two volumes contain the memoir of William Sharp by his widow, based on his diaries and letters, which was published a few years ago in somewhat different form. The fourteen volumes hold all that the author thought fit to preserve of his work. He holds a singular place in English literature, that of a skilful and thoroughly respectable workman in prose and of a poet of limited range under his own name, while, hidden by his pseudonym, he struck a new and true poetic note, which will keep his name alive. The pieces included in "Vistas" show that he was reaching toward that end.

Those That Toil on the Sea.

An extremely interesting book has been written by David Hannay in "The Sea Trader: His Friends and Enemies" (Little, Brown and Company). It is not a history of commerce, but an attempt to show how trading was carried on from the beginnings to the time when sailing ships were driven out practically by steam. The author writes with a chip on his shoulder, as his peppery remarks on the seamanship of classical scholars and on other subjects on which he has strong opinions show. He dwells briefly on the trade of antiquity, but the greater part of his book is given up to the exciting story of how trade developed, and particularly British trade, on the ocean, in the east and the west and on the Spanish main. He has much to say, too, about pirates and slaves. He handles a subject that has not often been dealt with from a point of view that is novel and original. He has made a book that is full of exciting adventure and that gives many subjects for reflection.

Narrower in scope and much less important but still dealing with exciting matter is E. Keble Chatterton's "King's Cutters and Smugglers, 1700-1855" (George Allen and Company; J. B. Lippincott Company). The author's chief interest is in the construction of ships, but he has here the whole romantic period of smuggling to deal with, and he has drawn on newly discovered sources. He tells how it became profitable to convey goods without paying the duties out of and into England, the precautions taken against this on land and sea, the exploits of the smugglers and of their pursuers. A volume of adventure from beginning to end.

On Cardinal Richelieu.

A detailed and on the whole interesting life of "Cardinal de Richelieu" is written by Eleanor C. Price (McBride, Nast and Company). It makes no great pretence at being scholarly, but on the other hand it follows so largely the accepted versions that one hardly demands a scrutiny of evidence. The author goes to contemporary writers for most of her narrative material, and quotes modern biographers for consensus of opinion. She has borne in mind that the widespread interest in Cardinal Richelieu is based on several grounds, on different phases, so that she has discussed him impartially as man, courtier and politician and has tried to keep a balance between the affairs that influenced history and the intrigues of the time which readers find so much more absorbing. Richelieu's personal adventures are passed over with the lightest touch; the author believes in the inherent interest of her material and resists the purple brush. The style of the book is far from distinguished, and in vividness it is uneven, but the reader feels grateful for a number of phrases which enliven the chapters and show the writer's sincerity.

Womankind.

It is noteworthy that whatever may be their conclusions as to the destiny and duty of woman and whatever may be their diagnosis of her present position most writers hold a similar interpretation of her historical background. In the present instance the authors of five books on woman base their divergent opinions on almost similar material. So one may accord them the credit of not fitting facts to theories.

"Woman Adrift," by Harold Owen, (E. P. Dutton and Company) is called by its author "a statement of the case against suffragism" and it is suffragism in England that is chiefly considered. Temperamentally one can see that Mr. Owen is one who believes that standing still is better than progressing fifteen feet over a precipice. But his argument is not of the standpat sort. He attacks the suffragists in every stronghold, even to the point of repeating that man is woman's superior physically and intellectually, and wherever it is possible he bases an argument on the antagonism of the sexes. It is this disposition, which has been so largely overcome by the sanest people on both sides of the question, that prevents Mr. Owen's book from carrying much weight even with those who agree with his main contention. The author writes colloquially, and with lance in rest. Any regard which he may have for his opponents dates back to Mill's "Subjection of Women," and he makes no pretence of consideration for later advocates. In the concluding chapter we are told, "I have failed to detect any fallacy in my reasoning," and the reader lays down the book with the feeling that were it less flawless it would be more convincing.

H. Addington Bruce has written a book on "Woman in the Making of America" (Little, Brown and Company). Mr. Bruce is best known, perhaps, for his "Scientific Healing," and the present volume is more by way of an excursion into the side issues of history. He gives a very readable narrative of women both famous and obscure, and without making one feel that he holds any especial brief he pays tribute to the importance of women's clubs and points to suffrage as the proper outcome of an ever spreading activity.

In "Why Women Are So" by Dr. Mary Roberts Coolidge (Henry Holt and Company), an analysis of women's restlessness is attempted. The contrast between woman's position in the domestic régime of Victorian tradition and her present one is drawn throughout the book to explain such criticisms as "lack of team play," "scrappy mindedness," and so on, among women. An interesting part of the book is the account of what is expected of women in behavior, conversation and such matters and how it came to be traditional. The with many kinds of women, and her comments have somewhat the homely ring of truth that one finds in the stories of Mary E. Wilkins. Dr. Coolidge would not prescribe the future of women, but she looks with cheerfulness to the working out of their own destiny. Her attitude in an interesting and generally sound book is put in the closing chapter: "What, then, do women need? Above all, fair play and freedom from interference * * * for we know not what we shall be."

In "The Advance of Woman," by Jane Johnstone Christie (J. B. Lippincott and Company) the author makes a historical survey of woman's development, beginning with our dumb progenitors, through the matriarchate and the rule of man down to the present day. Mrs. Christie offers familiar material and no very definite views. Her book is rather a condensing of a vast amount of information with the object of exalting womankind. The style is somewhat jerky, but the book is very readable and not too long for the interested reader.

Earl Barnes, a professor of education in Leland Stanford, has written a book called "Woman in Modern Society" (B. W. Huebsch). His best chapter, on the whole, is his first, "What it Means to Be a Woman," in which he makes both shrewd and sound observations on the distinction between men and women in emotion, periodicity, particularization, and so on. He later discusses the feminizing of culture and women in industry with a good deal of vigor. Equal suffrage he holds to be possible, although universal man or woman suffrage is not, and a eugenic conscience is the only remedy for the defects of the marriage system. There is not much that one can definitely agree or disagree with in Dr. Barnes's book, but as a crystallization of the talk of the day it is clear and sufficiently brief.

The Search for Art.

Admirers of Isadora Duncan and her school and of the Russian dancers who have visited New York will be pleased with the handsome small quarto volume "Dancing and Dancers of To-day" (Dodd, Mead and Company), in which Caroline and Charles H. Caffin glorify them and the dances in which they appear. They refer politely to the existence of the dance and of mimes among the ancients and in primitive races, but they make it pretty clearly understood that before Mr. Gordon Craig and Miss Duncan the intellectual basis for the art did not exist. The modern achievement receives fulsome praise in that rhapsodical vocabulary with which music programmes befog the intelligence of people who know little about music but would like to talk about it. There are many fine pictures from photographs, so that the volume may serve as an illustrated record of the ballet performances of the last few seasons.

Salem, Mass., is the headquarters of Mary H. Northend in preparing "Colonial Homes and Their Furnishings" (Little, Brown and Company), though she ranges up the back country as far as Portsmouth and occasionally darts out to other places. The close study of a limited district gives thoroughness to her work, and students of things colonial may take the generalizations she draws from what she has seen as authoritative, and her definitions and explanations as accurate for the New England branch of colonial lore. She touches on exteriors and gardens, but the important part of the book is that which deals with the internal fittings, the furniture and other belongings. The book is very fully illustrated with carefully selected pictures from photographs.

How wide the range of objects is for which collectors strive is demonstrated by a volume written by Eliza Calvert Hall, "A Book of Hand Woven Coverlets" (Little, Brown and Company). The illustrations, both plain and colored, show that an astonishing amount of decorative art was developed in these home products, and the author has collected an amazing list of technical terms employed in the industry, some of which she is able to explain. She can give also the history of some coverlets. The greater part of her book, however, is filled with pardonable expressions of admiration for these coverlets, most of which seem to be in the possession of Southern ladies.

A memorial biography or eulogy of "William T. Richards," a painter, who in his day held respectable rank among Americans and was highly esteemed, especially in Philadelphia, has been written by Harrison S. Morris (J. B. Lippincott Company). The little volume is illustrated with many reproductions of pictures, almost all marines, the subject in which the painter specialized and which the biographer prefers to lay stress on. He seems embarrassed to find terms in which to praise a phase of art that has passed, but he is fully justified in ascribing to Mr. Richards the important place he occupied when Americans were trying to work their own way in art, unaided by European teaching. He draws an attractive picture of a quiet and blameless life.

Historical.

Though Mr. Sidney Whitman in his preface to "German Memories" (William Heinemann; Charles Scribner's Sons) asserts that he has come into contact with every class, high or low, his reminiscences deal almost entirely with aristocratic circles. About himself he has to tell of pleasant schooldays and of life in Dresden, but the greater part of his book is devoted to the famous men whom he met in one way or another, Bismarck, the old Emperor, Moltke, Lenbach, Mommsen, and others of only lesser note, with some of later days such as Von Bülow. Nearly every name of rank in Germany for forty years past passes in review and for every one the author has some personal impression to relate. It is a book of great interest for what it says of them and for what it says of German life also.

In "Romantic Days of the Early Republic" (Little, Brown and Company) Mary Caroline Crawford has written a very entertaining volume. She has put together the society gossip of the cities outside of Boston, not as minutely as in her two volumes on that city, but just as vividly. These are the stories that the formal histories omit or only allude to, but they are as necessary to the understanding of the times and of men as the economic or political records, for they are full of human nature. The author tells the stories well. They will be enjoyed as much by those who know them already as by those to whom they are new.

The articles that Alexander Moret has put together under the title "Kings and Gods of Egypt" (G. P. Putnam's Sons) are of a miscellaneous character though most deal with religion. He tells in the light of the latest researches what we know about Osiris, about the worship of Isis, about the Egyptian ideas of immortality. He recites the remarkable story of how the hieroglyphics were deciphered; of Egyptian travellers, of Queen Hatshopsitu and King Amenophis IV. His purpose is to popularize the results of Egyptological studies but there is no sacrifice of scholarship in the attempt. Every one of his chapters will be found highly interesting.

The needs of "university extension" students were in the volume of William Henry Hudson in writing "The Story of the Renaissance" (Cassell and Company, New York), and he seems to have accomplished his object very well. He handles the subject as an intellectual and social development, of which art is only one manifestation. There is more about the invention of printing, therefore, with its consequences, of philosophy, religion and literature than there is about art, though that also is duly considered. For popular reading, that may lead to more serious study, the book will do good service.

A curious side of the civil war has been investigated by William Gilmour Beymer, the spy service on both sides. The stories he has gathered are published under the title "On Hazardous Service" (Harpers). They are exciting and tragic enough, but it is difficult to feel much

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